

History

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Electro-Motive was an important part of city's economy



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Part Two

Electro-Motive had originally leased the old Rossie Velvet mill on South Park Street. Wartime production boomed, and in October 1944, the Lauters opened Plant Number No. 2 in the old Windham Co. cotton mills on Bridge Street, previously occupied by the Corn Silk Spinning Co.

By December 1945, the Connecticut Circle revealed that the company was utilizing over 200,000 square feet, and employing more than 1,200 workers to manufacture a wide range of capacitors. This product was apparently resistant to humidity, and was produced from high quality "Indian Ruby Mica."

Another fine product of the Willimantic workshops was the "new and revolutionary" El Menco fuse plug, the only electric plug on the market to carry its own fuses, "easily removable and available in all amperages." In the days before fused plugs, electrical goods were repeatedly damaged because of power surges and



An Electro-Motive Co. worker tests mica-capacitors in the company's South Park Street factory in the 1940s.

short circuits.

Josephine Lauter, Electro-Motive's president, was remarried to Jesse Greer (1896-1970), a prolific Tin Pan Alley songsmith. Greer was a contemporary of the Gershwins, Rodgers, Berlin, Hart and Hammerstein. Indeed, Greer's first job on Broadway, like George Gershwin, was a

"plugger" for songs. He played the piano and sang new songs in music stores, before the advent of radio, to introduce them to the public. In 1957 he wrote the song "Willimantic, USA" which became the city's theme song. Josephine Lauter was a director of the Willimantic Chamber of Commerce, a member of the local zoning

board, was active in the local Red Cross and had organized a kit bag for a soldiers program during World War II.

Electro-Motive's workforce in 1945 was 90 percent women, aged between 16-60, who were employed in an "orderly and modern plant." They had high wages and bonuses, morning and afternoon rest periods, one

week paid vacation, sick benefit, group insurance, frequent parties and dances, a cafeteria serving hot meals — and music was broadcast throughout the plant during the shifts.

By 1945 one-third of the nation's mica condensers were manufactured in Willimantic. This figure would grow rapidly, with the explosive growth of television after World War II. By the late 1960s the company employed 2,000 people in Willimantic, South Carolina and Jamaica.

Electro-Motive also contributed to research in the U.S. space program. Willimantic-based technology fed into the Gemini program and the Surveyor spacecraft's soft moon-landing technology. The company also profited from several Cold War defense programs, including the Navy's 1960s MK torpedo, which could automatically home in on its intended target.

Capacitors produced in Willimantic were also a central feature of the massive growth of the electronics and computer industries during the 1950s and 1960s. The Connecticut Circle reminds us that the Electro-Motive Co. was an important part of the city's economy for almost two generations.